

V. ACHIEVING THE VISION

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

A. INTRODUCTION

The community has expressed a desire to utilize the Plan of Conservation and Development as an instrument of municipal government to preserve and enhance desired aspects of Newtown's community character. This section of the Plan focuses on defining Newtown's community character, followed by an examination of opportunities to preserve and enhance desired community character elements, even as Newtown continues to grow. A full discussion of the need to incorporate Community Character consideration in updating Newtown's POCD is provided in Plan Memorandum #1, Community Character.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CHARACTER?

IT'S A LITTLE HARD TO DEFINE, BUT I KNOW IT
WHEN I SEE IT."

B. DEFINING NEWTOWN'S COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community character is the essence of a town. The character of Newtown is shaped by its physical attributes and by the sense of community arising from the many activities which take place within its boundaries.

- **Pastoral and Rural Landscape:** The visual character of Newtown is derived from the perception of both its natural landscape and the built environment. Newtown's visual character is shaped in part by its "green" and pastoral landscapes. The remaining vestiges of Newtown's past agricultural character, combined with its rolling terrain, and large forested areas, generates a sense of openness that still dominates the visual character of significant areas of the Town. Areas of Newtown possessing strong pastoral and rural characteristics are indicated on the Map of Pastoral and Rural Landscapes.



Great Ring Road

- **Natural Features:** Newtown's terrain is largely rolling, punctuated by steep hills and deep valleys, rock outcroppings, flood plains and wetlands. Newtown contains several significant natural and manmade water features including: Lakes Zoar and Lillinonah on the Housatonic River; the Pootatuck River, which flows northward across Newtown, emptying into the Housatonic River; Taunton Pond, a beautiful upland water body; Pond Brook; Deep Brook; Limekiln Brook; the Upper Aspetuck River; and the Halfway River, on Newtown's southeastern boundary with Monroe.
- **Newtown's Image Corridors:** Some of Newtown's well traveled roadways possess particularly picturesque views of the Town's "countryside." These areas have been identified as Image Corridors, where the views from the roadways establish lasting images of the town's natural beauty and contribute to the formation of Newtown's community character. Identified Image Corridors are highlighted on the Map of Image Corridors.

Figure 2 – Pastoral & Rural Landscapes

- **Open Space:** Publicly owned open space and land protected by non-profit land trust organizations directly contribute to the visual perception of Newtown's rural and pastoral qualities. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection controls approximately 3,075 acres of State forests and parklands in Newtown and private conservation organizations in Newtown collectively control over 1,800 acres of open space. Many of these private open space holdings have very prominent locations and make powerful contributions to the collective perception of the visual character of Newtown. Together, these several thousand acres of open space continually define Newtown's "green" image.

The perception of Newtown's community character is very significantly influenced by the visual qualities of the manmade elements of Newtown's landscape. These elements include:

- **The Borough of Newtown:** The Borough contains shopping areas, numerous local businesses, municipal facilities, churches and the Flag Pole. Portions of the Borough, especially Main Street, and the views of the Flag Pole from many different vantage points within town, form very powerful visual images which strongly influence the collective perception of Newtown's community character. These manmade features of Newtown's built environment combine to provide a key focal point of "community" within the Town. Newtown has long placed a high priority on maintaining the historic character of the Borough.
- **Newtown's Hamlets:** In addition to the Borough, Newtown has four historic hamlets, Sandy Hook, Hawleyville, Dodgingtown and Botsford. Each historical hamlet is characterized as a mixed-use center serving the surrounding neighborhoods and serve as community focal points within the context of the larger Town. Each hamlet has a distinct history and character and each contributes to the overall perception of Newtown.
- **Public Buildings and Community Character:** The elements of the built environment created through public investment play an important role in defining Newtown's community character. The environment created through public investment, which includes public buildings, parks, streets, and monuments are visible elements of the manmade environment which influence the perception of community image, as well as the perception of the collective value which Newtown residents place on their community.
- **Public Streets:** Newtown has 226 miles of local roads covering approximately 1,100 acres of Newtown's landscape. What happens on, within and along this public realm significantly affects the perception of Newtown's community character.
- **Public Parks:** Newtown has seven Town parks and playing fields totaling 180.67 acres. In addition to their physical presence, these facilities have an impact on the perception of the quality of services offered by the Town, which in turn contributes to the development of community character.
- **Residential Neighborhoods:** The largest category of Newtown's built environment, in terms of land area affected, is the Town's housing stock. The predominate type of housing in Newtown is single family detached houses surrounded by landscaped yards. Newtown's newer residential

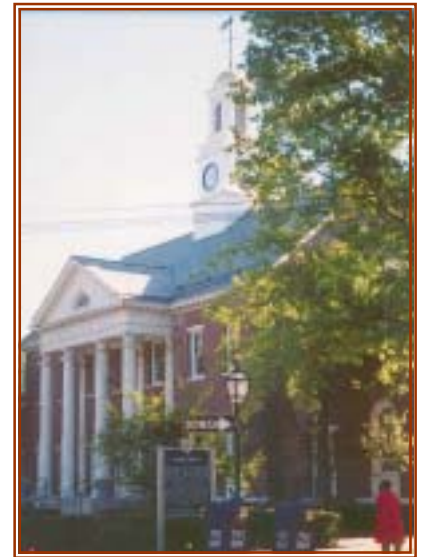


Figure 3 – Image Corridors

neighborhoods elicit a suburban quality to the visual environment, making it an increasingly significant element of the Town's community character. The overall character of Newtown's housing stock is one of very good quality, a very positive element of the Town's community character.

- **Newtown's Commercial Corridors:** Most of the commercial uses serving the needs of Newtown's residents are located along Route 25 and Route 6 and within the Borough. The common visual characteristic of many of Newtown's commercial uses, often located side by side, is a parking lot fronting the highway, which elicits a character of strip suburban development. Because commercial uses front on the most heavily traveled roadways in Newtown, their appearances contributes significantly to the daily perception of Newtown's community character, for residents and visitors alike.



- **Newtown's Business Centers:** The appearance of businesses visible from Newtown's heavily traveled roadways contributes to the daily perception of the Town's community character.

The quality of life experienced by those living and working in Newtown helps to form a perception of the Town's community character. In addition to considerations of the quality of the Town's natural and manmade environments, the quality of services provided by the public, private and institutional sectors contributes to an assessment of the quality of life afforded to town residents and those working within Newtown. The quality of services, including education, transportation, health, recreational, police, fire, emergency and retail can vary substantially from town to town and are the aspects of community often discussed by residents when describing the quality of life within their town.

- **Community Gathering Places and Focal Points:** Public gathering places and community focal points contribute positively to a Town's self image and function to provide a sense of community. Places of this nature in Newtown include churches, schools, playgrounds, parks, municipal buildings and public monuments. Community gathering places and focal points afford opportunities for residents to interact and provide important visual reference points.



- **Sense of Place:** The quality of Newtown's natural and built environments, the level of community activities and the availability and quality of services helps residents and visitors to formulate an impression of the Town's community character. These are the special and unique characteristics which set Newtown apart and make it a memorable place.

C. COMMUNITY CHARACTER: ISSUES, GOALS AND ACTION AGENDA

The formation of community character is a process characterized by incremental change. Change is a constant in every community and the character of Newtown will continue to evolve as the community matures.

The elements of Newtown's community character held in high esteem by Town residents have been developed into community planning goals to be used as guidance for future activities that will affect

the quality of life in Newtown. These planning goals are an important foundation of the updated POCD, addressing the key issues of growth, conservation and the management of change. The following section identifies the issues affecting the key elements of Newtown's community character, defines community planning goals and recommends an action agenda to achieving those goals.

ISSUE #1: NEWTOWN'S PASTORAL AND RURAL LANDSCAPE

1. The visual character of Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape, including open fields, stonewalls, ponds and streams, country lanes, forested areas, etc., makes a valued contribution to Newtown's Community Character.
2. Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape is altered one lot at a time, as undeveloped land is subdivided and built upon.
3. Some views of Newtown from State highways form lasting images of the Town's natural beauty and contribute to the Town's perceived community character.
4. Reference Issue #4, Newtown's Farmland, in the Conservation of Natural Resources section of this 2003 POCD.

Goal: Maintain the scenic characteristics of Newtown's "Pastoral and Rural Areas," and "Image Corridors" and enhance the "Gateways" to Newtown.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH1	1.	Define and map specific areas and roads critical to Newtown's preservation of its rural and pastoral landscapes.	PZC	BS		
COCH1	2.	Develop regulations and other means to protect these areas.	PZC	LC		
COCH1	3.	Pursue the use of context sensitive design standards for the maintenance, upgrading and construction of town roads that contribute to the preservation of these critical roads.	BS	LC		
COCH1	4.	Develop a means of preserving Newtown's country roads to protect the pastoral, rural and scenic characteristics of Newtown's landscape.	BS	PZC	LC	
COCH1	5.	Utilize the State's Scenic Road Program to help protect the scenic vistas of State highways within identified "Image Corridors."	BS	LC	PZC	
COCH1	6.	Create and adopt design guidelines for business and industrial areas.	PZC	EDC	BZC	
COCH1	7.	Encourage the elimination of overhead utility lines.	BS	BB	PZC	BZC

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Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH1	8.	Establish and implement an "Adopt-A-Spot" plan for points of entry and key locations within the Town.	EDC	PZC	BZC	
COCH1	9.	Critique and update the Special Exceptions section of Newtown's Planning and Zoning Regulations as an aid in maintaining the character of Newtown.	PZC			
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ISSUE #2: APPEARANCE OF NEWTOWN'S CORRIDORS AND VILLAGE AREAS

1. The Borough is the historic center of Newtown and contributes significantly to the Town's community character.
2. Each of Newtown's four mixed-use hamlets (Botsford, Dodgingtown, Hawleyville and Sandy Hook) contributes in different ways to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.
3. Most commercial uses serving the needs of Newtown's residents have been regulated to front on arterial highways, including Route 25 south of the Borough, Church Hill Road and Route 6 west of Saw Mill Road.
4. Many commercial uses are located in freestanding buildings with shallow setbacks from the highway and parking lots in front. Other commercial uses are located in small shopping centers with similar design characteristics.
5. The common visual characteristic of many commercial uses, often located side-by-side, is a parking lot fronting the highway, which elicits an impression of strip-suburban development.
6. Because these commercial uses front on the most heavily traveled roadways in Newtown, their appearance contributes to the daily perception of Newtown's community character, for residents and visitors alike.
7. Route 25 has several large undeveloped and unprotected tracts of land. These undeveloped tracts contribute to Newtown's character.
8. Currently, some portions of these corridors have an unsightly appearance while others are quite attractive.

Goal: Preserve the mixed-use functions and enhance the visual appearance of Newtown's Corridors and Villages.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH2	1.	Implement the Newtown EDC's recommendation that the Newtown Planning and Zoning Commission prepare design criteria for use by developers proposing new and expanded commercial, industrial, multi-family and mixed-use development projects.	PZC	EDC		

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH2	2.	Support the Borough's proposal to develop and implement Village District regulations that will govern the design of future development activities within the Borough and improve pedestrian mobility.	BB	PZC	BZC	
COCH2	3.	Develop and define design criteria for the Sandy Hook Design District and support streetscape-enhancement proposals.	PZC	BS	EDC	
COCH2	4.	Develop and define design criteria for the Hawleyville Design District.	PZC	BS	EDC	
COCH2	5.	Determine the need in other Hamlets for streetscape specifications regarding sidewalks, curbing, street lighting, landscaping, and storm water management.	BS	PZC	LC	EDC
COCH2	6.	Pursue efforts to protect vacant lands surrounding the Borough and Newtown's four hamlets to preserve the historic settlement pattern of mixed-use villages and hamlets surrounded by open land.	PZC	CC	OS	BS
COCH2	7.	Formulate regulations for mixed-use development that incorporates landscaped public places and design features that create pedestrian-friendly environments.	PZC	BZC	EDC	
COCH2	8.	Require that visually attractive buffers be installed between commercial and residential uses where mixed-use development is impossible and linkage is unwarranted.	PZC	BZC		
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ISSUE #3: THE PUBLIC REALM

The quality of the public realm created by Town buildings, parks and monuments strongly influences the perception of Newtown's community character and the sense of community pride.

Goal: Enhance the public realm's contributions to Newtown's Community Character.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH3	1.	Develop a sighting and design strategy for construction and upgrade of Town-owned buildings and facilities that will enhance the public's perception of Newtown's community character.	BS	PZC	PBSC	

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH3	2.	Integrate new municipal facilities into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood.	PBSC	PZC	BZC	
COCH3	3.	Consider co-location of municipal facilities, such as parks associated with schools or other public buildings, to create community activity centers and provide opportunities for community interaction.	BS	PRC	PBSC	BE
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ISSUE #4: HISTORIC SITES AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

1. Newtown's Community Character is defined in part by the presence of historic structures and archaeological sites that provide links to the Town's past.
2. Some historical and archaeological resources in Newtown have been preserved for continued public enjoyment and education through local and municipal actions, including the establishment of historic districts in the Borough and Hattertown and the creation of the Orchard Hill Nature Center.

Goal: Preserve Newtown's historic sites and archeological resources.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH4	1.	Develop a Town-wide archeological resource inventory.	OS	PZC	Town Historian	
COCH4	2.	Incorporate archeological inventory information as part of Newtown's land-development regulatory process to protect valued historic sites and archaeological resources as protected open space	PZC	CC	OS	
COCH4	3.	Explore the use of "village district" regulations and "delay of demolition" ordinances to further protect Newtown's historic resources.	BS LC	PZC	BZC	
COCH4	4.	Implement building permit options that will encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures in commercial districts	BS	EDC	PZC	
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Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
COCH4	5.	Promote the utilization of historic tax credits for income-producing properties.	EDC	BS	LC	
COCH4	6.	Support initiatives that encourage historic preservation such as historic register/historic place designations.	BS	LC	BB	Town Historian

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